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Contest Information

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I am writing this story to participate in NightHooves's writing contest.

To take part in the contest you have to choose a horse from their story "Travelers: The Torn Lands" and create a story about them. It can be anything from an adventure story to a background story.

Please go to her account if you want to learn more or even participate yourself!
With that said, I want to admit I do not own any characters in this story. Even the characters I make up for the story (such as Sun Leap's parents: Stone Star and Bird Mane) I relinquish ownership of them and offer them to NightHooves since this is a story based off of theirs.

Also fair warning, this story is going to be pretty short so don't expect it to reach 15 chapters.

Prologue

Stone Star, a tall and powerful golden stallion with a proud grey star on his forehead, from which he received his name, stood upon a small hill that poured into a corner drawn plain. His mate, a mare named Bird Mane, rested below him, taking refuge in high grasses that would prove an excellent camoflauge for her. In this field of silver turning grass, the two horses were alone.
They had abandoned their birth herd, deciding they wanted to pursue independent lives together where they didn't have to depend on a herd for survival. It had only been 19 days since they left the herd and they both believed a new home was close. It burned in them, determination to press on into an unknown landscape and to always remember how far they've come.
Time paused and the watching mother that was the moon was hidden by the birthing of the sun. Stone Star moved down the hill, the dancing warm light and the vibrations of his soft trotting echoing in the Earth awoke Bird Mane. She rose from her hiding spot as Stone Star approached.
Bird Mane waited for Stone Star to get in range before reaching out to take a few strands of his mane in her teeth and tugged on it gently with affection. Stone Star returned the gesture but began to walk, urging Bird Mane to follow in pursuit. Each day they had to continue to search for a home to call their own.

Chapter 1

They had continued traveling for another day. It had reached the point in time where the sun was to be recycled by the horizon to be reused later. For now it was too dark to continue so Stone Star and Bird Mane began to rest where they were.
The next morning the duo awoke and were pleased. The place they had barely entered and rested in was a large meadow full of beautiful flowers of different shapes, sizes and colors. They watched the sunrise, it's rise faster here then any other place they've been before.
"We should name the meadow Sun Leap for how fast the sun moves here." Bird Mane suggested. Her cream mane flowed with the wind like they had been surrounded by other worldly water, the sun shining upon her white coat. Stone Star glanced at her with his golden pelt also graced by the light of the new day.
"We will make this a sanctuary for all herd less horses..." Stone Star declared.
And in time they did, the Sun Leap Meadow became a short lasting haven to weary horses who were choosing to travel alone in the big, great world. Bird Mane would help any injured or sick horses that crossed into the meadow, Stone Star guarded the borders and gave directions to any who asked, or sent away those who did not belong.
With the thought of prosperity and success Stone Star and Bird Mane decided it was the right time, and safest time, to have a foal. They continued to keep the meadow a safe and flourishing territory for the birth of their child, and any who asked for refuge.
Bird Mane became heavier with pregnancy, soon it made her role in the meadow difficult to keep up with. Again they were smiled upon by destiny as a lone grey mare and her own foal arrived at the meadow for food and water. The mare revealed herself to be Dusty Sky and her foal to be a filly named Nimble Rain. Bird Mane had asked Dusty Sky to stay to help her with giving birth to her own foal and she was fortunate Dusty Sky was kind and agreed to help the other mother.
The day of dawning came and Dusty Sky helped Bird Mane give

birth to a healthy colt, his fur a bright gold and his mane just as creamy as his mother's. His legs were socked in the same color, and his eyes bore a hazel eyesight. Bird Mane had been so relieved that her son was born with ease.
Dusty Sky nickered at her.
"What will his name be?" The grey mare asked. Nimble Rain watched from a distance, being told to keep a few feet between her and the birthing as to not scare her. She approached now slowly. The small philly was still very young, her walk was still a little uneven and she didn't speak at all except for nodding or shaking her head. She had a grey body like her mother but her mane was a darker grey, but not exactly black. She had white spots all along her hind legs. Bird Mane looked from her foal to the sky, seeing the sun.
"I will name him Sun Leap.. this meadow will be his..." Bird Mane said with gentle promise. Dusty Sky nodded slowly.
"I'm grateful for you allowing I and my foal within your meadow. I hope this help I have given you will repay that debt. I should leave before I owe more to you humble horses." She called for Nimble Rain as if she were planning to leave there and now with Bird Mane standing over her new foal.
"No. You will not owe us anything, you never did. Please, Dusty Sky, stay with us. You'll be safe here." Bird Mane offered. Dusty Sky paused and Nimble Rain slowly walked around her mother. The grey mare glanced back at Bird Mane who had a hopeful look in her eyes.
The mare glanced at her foal who was looking at the newborn, Sun Leap, sighing.
"Very well. It is a comfort to have somewhere safe to raise Nimble Rain..." Dusty Sky admitted. Bird Mane smiled at her.
"Thank you." She said quietly.
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Sun Leap had begun walking and had started becoming familiar with the meadow. Nimble Rain had realized all this meant she could have another foal as a friend. She would chase him and tease him, but he was still rather young. He couldn't escape her but Nimble Rain knew he didn't get mad at her.
Dusty Sky and Bird Mane had been happy to see Sun Leap and Nimble Rain getting along. Stone Star had been informed of what happened and was very pleased with Sun Leap. His name, his appearance, his gender, it was everything his father wanted.

Stone Star decided he would allow his son to accompany him on a tour around the meadow. He didn't expect to give his son any responsibilities yet, he just planned on making him familiar with the land. Nimble Rain would sometimes accompany them, her new living arrangements urged her to want to know this land as much as possible alongside Sun Leap.

By years they learned and guarded the land, letting what it represented stand strong. The legend of Sun Leap Meadow spread miles upon the world, becoming a presence in the back of any horse's mind to remind them there was a safe place for refuge if they ever needed it.

Sun Leap and Nimble Rain had aged appropriately and were now the new guardians of the meadow. Stone Star still patrolled the meadow, but Sun Leap had taken more vigorous trips around the border. His mother and Nimble Rain's mother had aged and spent their slow days grazing in the meadow.

Sun Leap now stood as a modest stallion, generosity gifted to his list of qualities due to the factors of his upbringing. He was strong and forgiving, but he was ruthless. He was gentle but severe all at the same time. He could allow any strange horse within his meadow, but he could slay a cougar when necessary.

One night he returned to the center of his meadow with Nimble Rain and saw his mother and father resting by the river. It's waters flowed steadily, the small sounds it made soothed his ears. Stone Star and Bird Mane looked upon him with pride and gratitude.

"Sun Leap, come here." Bird Mane requested of her son. The mix of gold and cream trotted over after offering Nimble Rain wishes of a good nights rest as she left to address her mother.

"Yes, mother?" Sun Leap asked, flipping his long mane from his face so he could see them better. Bird Mane smiled sweetly at him, a look only mothers could use.

"You know our time is coming. I don't wish to make you sad, Sun Leap, but we will be gone someday," Bird Mane cast her gaze to Nimble Rain not too far from them. "So we wanted to talk to you. You and Nimble Rain are close, aren't you?" His mother asked. Sun Leap followed his mother's gaze to the youngest mare in his meadow. He nodded slowly and faced his parents again, understanding what they were hinting at.

"I understand why you're concerned. If Nimble Rain is destined to

be mine, then the Herds of Starry Paths will make it so." Sun Leap said. Stone Star sighed and Bird Mane nodded slowly, her greying mane gentle waving, as if the breeze didn't want to caress her too much in fear she would fall apart. Stone Star still had his edge, but he could not deny the change age gifted to him.
"This is your meadow now, son. Keep it alive long after us." Stone Star spoke up, the first time in the entire day. Sun Leap bowed his head to his father and moved away to give them the privacy they earned.

Chapter 2

Sun Leap and Nimble Rain had taken heavy blows. Stone Star had passed the previous night in his slumber. All Sun Leap could say was he was relieved his father was capable of dying peacefully. Stone Star had been a father of brick and mist. He was mysterious, strong, approachable, yet intimidatingly curious. Sun Leap paused as he walked the perimeter, his head was low but his ears were alert. He may be briefly mourning for his father, but he would not allow himself to fail his father only a day after he passed his legacy of the meadow to him.

He heard no hooves, he couldn't sense any dangers around him. His ears continued to swivel in every direction, almost silently challenging the universe to send something at him.

Someday he knew it would, though he was uncertain if his father was that challenge. Sun Leap sighed and continued his prowl of the meadow's rim. Nimble Rain was deep within the meadow, her eyes on the small river that traveled within.

Her mother was not far away talking to Bird Mane. Nimble Rain had been conscious of their conversation, they wanted her and Sun Leap to be together but she knew it wasn't the right path. She and Sun Leap were very close, but not in love.

They had spoken about it together in private, each of them receiving a push toward each other from their parents. Sun Leap said he respected Nimble Rain, loved her like a sibling and wouldn't dare step over that boundary unless she absolutely believed he should. Nimble Rain could admit to herself that Sun Leap was an attractive stallion, but she never saw him as a romantic interest. They had both agreed they wouldn't participate in romance with each other, even if their parents tried to force them together.

She sighed and glanced at the mothers behind her. Bird Mane seemed sorrowful, but she looked up at Nimble Rain and some happiness appeared in her lost eyes. Stone Star had been an acceptable loss to all of them, they understood he was going to pass, but his death couldn't be ignored or glossed over that easily. Nimble Rain was saddened as well, the strong stallion had been a father to her in many ways.

He let her learn alongside Sun Leap and allowed her to be taught how to fight. He let her have the freedom of choice, though usually mares were expected to be elegant and prepared to take on a mate. She was proud of what he helped her become, though she wasn't as head strong as the average stallion.
Sun Leap was returning and she saw his large figure softly traveling through the meadow towards them. He took a drink from the river not far from her, but he turned his gaze toward their mothers. He glanced at her a moment before walking away.
Nimble Rain watched him. He was off to guard the border of the meadow again.
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Soon Bird Mane had passed as well, and Dusty Sky had decided to leave the meadow, claiming she didn't want her child to see her die. Nimble Rain understood her mother, though she was distraught by it. Sun Leap had done his best to comfort her, but he couldn't always be with her. He had a responsibility to guard his meadow. Nimble Rain did her best to return the comfort, he had lost his mother and his father, he should have been in much more pain then her. Sun Leap did miss them, wishing he had longer moments with them before they died, but it was the way of life.
Now they were running in the path of starlight above with their other ancestors.
Sun Leap stalked the rim of the meadow, his mind beginning to clear after their losses. Nimble Rain was starting to move on as well. The year began to pass, feeling as if it moved faster and faster each dawn and dusk, as if the world was galloping to new horizons so Sun Leap and Nimble Rain could be given a new reason to gallop with it to those daily sunrises.
They had plenty, a home, visitors, and each other. Their cycle wasn't destined to end for some time.
But for now it rained, showers gifted to the grasses and the meadow by dark clouds. Sun Leap marched along the rim of his meadow as he always did. Nimble Rain accompanied him this time as she occasionally did. They had an incident with a cougar a few days before and she wanted to be with Sun Leap to help him if they needed to fight it off, and Sun Leap wanted her with him so she wouldn't be alone to fight it off if it got into the meadow.
Thunder clashed along the skyline, striking wherever it wanted. Amongst the storm a stallion appeared amongst all the chaos. Sun

Leap and Nimble Rain stopped their patrol to confront him. He stood tall, head high and muscles sternly held at bay incase a fight were to ensue. His coat was golden, a white blaze present in his features.
The stallion, obviously trying to boast a challenge to them, began to walk forward but he stumbled. When they saw that, Nimble Rain and Sun Leap rushed forward to help him stand properly. They brought him into the meadow as he protested.
"I don't need your help you free runners!" The stallion roared in anger, but the hint of pain in his voice was easily recognized by the guardians of the meadow. They've met horses with similar attitudes to this stallion.
"If you don't need our help, why did you come to my meadow?" Sun Leap demanded, his voice raised to be heard over the storm above.
The struggling stallion whipped his head to face Sun Leap as if he were to snap at him with a retort but his neigh failed him and his resistance lessened as he was brought to safety by Nimble Rain and Sun Leap.
They helped him reach the river where he rested. Nimble Rain went to find him something to eat that would get his energy up while Sun Leap stayed by his side. The other golden stallion looked over at him. The white blaze of his face must have been the most noticeable feature about him, but with the rain matting his mane to his forehead, and the lack of sun, it was barely seen except for the exposed parts of his snout.
"So this is it.. you're the legend.. the owner of this meadow...." The stranger spoke up. Sun Leap barely heard him over the rain.
"I may be the legend, but my father owned this meadow long before me..." Sun Leap corrected gruffly.
"You know my name, tell me yours now." Sun Leap nearly demanded of the other stallion.
"Lightning Cloud." He said softly, again going nearly unheard by Sun Leap.
"You're from a herd obviously, the way you addressed us..." Sun Leap commented. Lightning Cloud glared at him, but Sun Leap knew he wouldn't dare to attack him.

Chapter 3

It had been revealed by Lightning Cloud that he had been separated from his herd by the storm, and that he ran to the meadow for sanctuary. He hadn't known any other place to go, at least there was nothing else as close. Sun Leap promised the stallion, similar in age to himself, safety in the meadow until his herd found him or until he wished to leave.

The stallion was bold, but Sun Leap knew he was hesitating. He wasn't sure where his herd was and didn't want to risk getting lost in an unknown landscape. Lightning Cloud called him a legend, so he couldn't have known this land that well.

"Where does your herd come from? If you found my meadow, they can't be that far. Everywhere around is blocked by high mountains. There is only one way in and one way out." Sun Leap said to

Lightning Cloud when he spotted him near the edge of his domain. The golden stallion looked at him, the blaze on his face ignited from the sun. Sun Leap's own features were exaggerated on by the light of a new day. But the stallions didn't care for their features, only paying attention to who held themselves to a higher level of dominance.

Sun Leap knew Lightning Cloud must be born from a leader, from what he knew about other horses only someone in that position could be as high-standing as the other stallion was.

"My herd is not from nearby. We traveled into this land, for what reasons I cannot tell you." Lightning Cloud answered after some thoughtful silence. Sun Leap eyed him and stopped his trot, turning his head toward the plains surrounding his meadow and the distant mountains.

"Everyone has their secrets. I would hope you do not hold the important ones to yourself. And if you're standing here, at the edge, you may as well travel with me on my patrol. You've become restless awaiting your herd." Sun Leap suggested. The other stallion considered it and slowly approached Sun Leap, accepting his offer. He began his trot again, hoping to take this opportunity to make Lightning Cloud talk more about his herd.

Sun Leap was more curious about the herd's build up rather then the story behind Lightning Cloud's. He never had the experience of traveling around with basically your family, protecting each other and always moving to new places. He had similar experiences, sure, but none of them were the real thing.

Lightning Cloud did begin to loosen his lips and told small stories of his life to Sun Leap and many foal related fantasies, and it only made the gold and cream stallion more curious about an alternative life.

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Lightning Cloud and Sun Leap spent more time together with Lightning Cloud becoming more trustworthy as he proved himself. Sun Leap and Nimble Rain began to see him as a guardian of the meadow, but they both knew he wouldn't stay forever. His herd still had yet to appear for him and they knew it weighed heavily on his mind.

Sun Leap spoke with Nimble Rain about it many times before, usually at night in hushed tones. He had an idea of going with Lightning Cloud to search for his herd. He knew this valley well, it wasn't safe to go alone no matter how tough you thought you were. Nimble Rain had agreed he should go, but she also protested that she shouldn't be left alone to guard the meadow.

The golden stallion was torn. He refused to accept the idea of Lightning Cloud leaving to search on his own, but he couldn't leave Nimble Rain by herself either. He had also thought of having her come with them, but who would watch and guard the meadow?

If no one was there, no true harm could actually come to the meadow, but someone could try and claim it while they were gone.

It wouldn't be hard to take back, but the idea of another horse taking over the meadow going into it's history disturbed him. He sighed heavily as his mind settled on a choice.

He would go with Lightning Cloud to find his herd, and allow Nimble Rain to come with them if she chose to. He came to her that night and told her his decision. She agreed to wait in the meadow, but warned him if she faced something she couldn't handle she would retreat from the meadow for her safety.

He understood and went to tell Lightning Cloud. The other golden stallion waited by the river with a heavy mind.

"I have decided to accompany you outside the meadow to find your herd." Sun Leap informed him, coming over to drink from the stream. Lightning Cloud's heart seemed to lighten as he raised his head to look at Sun Leap.

"Thank you, I can only hope we find them quickly." He admitted, the worry easily seen in his tone. Sun Leap raised his head from his drink and nodded, his ears twitching at the sounds of nature around them.

"I have no doubt we will if they're in the valley." Sun Leap assured him, "They wouldn't leave you behind, I'm sure." Lightning Cloud nodded in response, turning away to clear his head with the blazeless stallion watching him go.

Chapter 4

Sun Leap looked back upon his meadow. The sight was gorgeous from where he stood in hesitance upon a hill overlooking the massive crowd of flowers. Nimble Rain was watching him from the edge of the meadow, a wish of good luck brightly present in her eyes.
Sun Leap nodded to her in farewell and turned away to follow after Lightning Cloud. The stallion wasn't too far ahead of him, the blaze on his face was brighter than usual. Sun Leap didn't know if he felt excitement or fear grow bigger within him as the distance between him and the meadow became bigger as well.
"Why did your herd enter the valley?" Sun Leap asked Lightning Cloud, the stallion was a yard ahead of him.
"My herd wanders far and wide. We normally travel through the valley as apart of the summer, but the storm is what drove us apart. We've traveled through rain like that before but it never thundered so furiously before. We scattered in fear when one of the others was stricken by lightning. We were in fear for our lives." Lightning Cloud explained. Sun Leap nodded as he listened. He was certain he too would be frightened by the sight of something such as another horse being struck by lightning. It must have been traumatizing.
"You're certain they wouldn't leave without you?" Sun Leap asked softly, trying to be careful in not arousing anger or doubt from the stallion. Lightning Cloud was quiet for a long time as they walked, the longest he had ever gone without replying since Sun Leap knew him.
"I didn't mean any harm in it, I just want you to be aware of it as a possibility..." Sun Leap explained after he felt guilt roll around in his stomach for bringing up the idea to the other golden stallion.
"I understand you may believe that because you have never been apart of a herd.. But my herd would never leave me. They're my family..." Lightning Cloud said, saying something at last helped the tension in Sun Leap's shoulders ease down.
"You're right that I have never been apart of a herd, but I do understand the value in family. It is a good reason to venture out alone into the unknown, the mere chance of reuniting with family is

the greatest risk you can take." Sun Leap offered as encouragment to the other stallion. Lightning Cloud said nothing as he returned a nod of his head. Sunleap could tell he still wasn't consoled, his spirit about as mellow as his shoulders.
He was suspended in a limbo of hope and doubt, but Sun Leap knew he would pick a side, and from the looks of their predicament so far, he was already reaching for hope. The golden stallions stayed silent a while longer, the only words shared between them were calm comments about the weather or environment.
After hours of wandering the open plains did they find evidence of other horses. Lightning Cloud had been the first to spot it, his legs kicking him forward with a little more vigor than before.
"Sun Leap, I see tracks!" The male called back. Sun Leap's head rose from a patch of bushes that seemed to have been picked clean of their nutrients. His ears swiveled to the stallion as he trotted over.
"How many tracks, enough for your herd?" He asked, pausing once he spotted the hoof marks among a large smeared patch of mud. There were many presses into the wet dirt, leaves and a few broken twigs scattered over it. This mud was violated a day or so ago, it was still moist but not liquidy like fresh mud patches.
Sun Leap, however, felt even if this was the tracks of a herd, they weren't going to be as close as they hoped. Lightning Cloud on the other hand was already searching for more tracks, shoving his nose to the ground as he looked and scanned for more evidence of other horses. Sun Leap followed after him, also keeping an eye out for more evidence.
"Do you still believe in your theory they've been staying in the valley to find you?" Sun Leap asked as he followed Lightning Cloud as he took a right through the forest. The other golden stallion raised his head to glance around before returning to his in-depth search.
"That is really my best bet. If these are there tracks then it proves I was right." Lightning Cloud said. Sun Leap let out a small sigh. Atleast he wouldn't have to worry about having to bring Lightning Cloud to the realistic thought that these may be another herd's tracks.